

Agenda Item: Annual Town Meeting

Meeting Date: Monday, 2 February 2026

Contact Officer: Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk

Background

The Annual Town Meeting, the holding of which is a statutory requirement, is scheduled to be held on Wednesday 18 March 2026. This is not a Town Council meeting but is administered by it as the parish council.

The format of this meeting usually remains the same, since it is principally a meeting for local electors to meet any Councillors who may be present to discuss parish/town affairs.

With WODC elections this year (and potential devolution changes from 2027), it is anticipated a greater number of residents may attend the meeting. **It should however be noted, this is not a political meeting nor an opportunity for debate or canvassing by electoral candidates or political party members;** only electors of the parish are permitted to speak/ask questions during the meeting.

Current Situation

Officers ask that the Council consider two options regarding the seating layout:

1. To have the full amount of tiered seating out as an auditorium event with Councillors seated to the front to one side and Officers and Thames Valley Police seated as previously at the back of the hall. The Mayor and Councillors would stand to address the attendees as necessary (Approx capacity 135)
2. As in the previous years, to have the seating retracted, apart from the bottom two rows, with large round tables in front running towards the back of the Hall (Capacity 80-90)

The details of the meeting are as follows:

- It is a statutory requirement to advertise the meeting in a local newspaper. The advert invites questions to be submitted to the Town Clerk/C.E.O ahead of the meeting. This would appear once in the 4th March edition.
- The meeting is Chaired by The Mayor, with the Leader on hand providing a welcome and assisting in highlighting points from the Annual Report. They will also welcome questions on all matters from the public.

- As in 2025 the Annual Report will be produced by Officers and published ahead of the meeting for residents to review, this will contain reports on each Committee along with other relevant material. The production of an Annual Report was a requirement of the NALC Local Council Silver Award for which the Town Council recently submitted its application for consideration. This negates the need for all Chairs to present their reports, with the Leader providing an overview after the mayor's introduction.
- Officers will prepare the Committee updates for the report which will be signed off by each Chair.
- Officers propose to show images from the Annual Report on the large screen during the meeting.
- There will be an official agenda, copies are prepared for the public and will be put on a table for collection as attendees enter the hall along with copies of the Annual Report.
- Witney Ward members from WODC/OCC are invited but do not take part in the formal part of the meeting.
- Thames Valley Police are invited to attend and usually present a verbal report and answer questions.
- Round Tables (if applicable) would be designated as 'Committee tables' which Chairs sit at and could be used after the main part of the meeting so they may discuss items relating to that committee.
- There will be the need for several members of staff to be present on the evening some of whom will be on hand to assist with the public raising their questions. The Senior Officers of the Council will be on hand to help direct Chairs with their answers to questions.
- It has been customary to provide non-alcoholic refreshments which could be provided by the opening of Café 1863.
- Officers will also encourage audience participation by use of the Slido app which residents can access via their mobile phones, to provide their views and questions.

Other suggestions:

Publicity

In addition to the advertisement in the Witney Gazette, Officers will advertise in the annual newsletter which will be delivered to all Witney properties. Officers will also place posters across the town, in Town Council locations, on the Website, screen in the Admin Office and publish on its social media platforms.

Youth Engagement

Officers have asked the Youth Council to provide a short video introducing themselves (subject to consent) and what they stand for, what they have done, and what they hope to fundraise for during the next year.

Community Engagement

Officers suggest that groups who have received grant funding from the Town Council during the past year are invited to participate in the creation of a short video of how the funding has been used and enhanced their services. They may also be invited to be on hand in the building to highlight their work.

Security

Officers are aware of the negative treatment received by Councillors and Council staff on this and other Oxfordshire Councils. Officers will cover security in the event's risk assessment.

Projects

Project Partners be requested to produce short videos regarding the West Witney Sports Ground & Leys projects.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – The advertisement of the meeting in the Witney Gazette and in poster format ensures that those who do not have social media access are reached.
- b) Biodiversity - None
- c) Crime & Disorder – A invitation of a representative from Thames Valley Police allows residents to raise issues directly with them.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency - None

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

- Effective communication and engagement with residents foster trust.
- The inclusion of the Youth Council would further indicate the Town Councils approach to awareness of issues of young people.

Financial implications

- The printing of the Annual Report and video production would be in house and therefore not attract any costs.
- There is an estimated £142 charge for advertising the Annual Town Meeting in the local newspaper and there is an allocated budget of £250 for this (budget line 4031/701).
- Officer resources for attendance at the meeting.
- There is no further budget for this meeting.

Recommendations

Member are invited to note the report and

1. Agree the layout and format so necessary arrangements can be made and,
2. Provide any further comments on the proposed suggestions.